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Book Review

One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America

By George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk

New York University Press, 2021

304 pages

US\$23.35

Reviewed by Mike Urton. Mike Urton, D.Min. is the director of Immigrant Mission for the Evangelical Free Church of America. He has been ministering among the Muslim and Muslim Background Believer population of Chicago for more than two decades.

Do conservative and progressive evangelicals share the same faith? This is the question that George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk address in their book *One Faith No Longer*. Employing a mixed methods study on participants in the USA, the authors found that “theologically progressive Protestants exhibit more social distance from conservative Christians than from politically progressive non-Christians” (pp. 3-4). The major reasons for this are that progressive Christians place more emphasis on “political values relating to social justice,” whereas conservative Christians’ “major concern is whether you agree with them on core theological points” (p. 4). Because these two groups have quite different foundations for their identity formation, Yancey and Quosigk believe that “it is time to regard them as distinct religious groups rather than as subgroups under a single religious umbrella” (p. 4).

In eight chapters, the authors demonstrate how they arrived at these conclusions. Chapter one explores the modernist-fundamentalist

controversy of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century with attention to its relationship with the current progressive-conservative split among Christians. Data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), a national probability study that is published every national election year, are utilized in chapter two to show how these two groups form their in-groups and out-groups. The authors specifically look at the attitudes that both progressive and conservative Christians have towards “Christian fundamentalists, atheists, Muslims, political conservatives, and political progressives” (p. 39) using the ANES. Chapter three dives into blogs written by those in each group who differ from their cohorts on certain political issues, such as progressive Christians who are pro-life and conservative Christians who fight for immigration reform.

Chapters 4-7 detail qualitative interviews that the authors conducted of evangelical Christians in the United States — thirty-six identified as theologically conservative and forty-two as theologically progressive. The interviewees were asked how they viewed other Christians and how they viewed Muslims. The Muslim question was explored because Christianity and Islam are the largest faith groups in the world and the authors wanted to see how each group viewed adherents of another religion. After the analysis of these interviews, chapter eight presents the conclusion that the division between conservative and progressive evangelicals resembles the split between Buddhism and Hinduism, thus “it is no longer useful to consider progressive and conservative Christians as members of the same religion” (p. 18). A concluding chapter speculates as to what the result of this conservative-progressive split among evangelicals could entail.

This study by Yancey and Quosigk could not be more timely, giving the reader a grasp of the conservative-progressive split experienced among American Evangelicals today. The thorough research using the triangulation of data provides confidence in the findings and conclusions.

Of the numerous helpful findings, I found three the most valuable for this current cultural moment in the United States. First, the authors explain how both groups form their identities. Progressives use their political values, or what the authors have termed a “humanistic ethic of social justice” (p. 137) in their identity formation, whereas conservatives focus on theological doctrines. Therefore, progressives tend to view conservative evangelicals as an “out-group” (p. 14), but conservatives may accept progressives who identify doctrinally as Christians.

Second, the authors explain how each group views the tasks of evangelism and mission. Because progressive Christians have few theological concerns at the core of their identity, they tend to “weaken justification for conservative Christian’s proselytization” and “create an

environment where it is unseemly for Christians to ‘witness’ to others” (p. 209). Rather, their mission focus is to “promote a social order of justice and kindness” (p. 191) and to persuade conservatives to adopt this view. Thus, these groups have vastly different approaches to the tasks of evangelism and missions.

Third, the authors conclude that “it is difficult to make any argument that progressive and conservative Christians belong in the same religious group” (p. 205). It is plain to see the implications: Members of each group will want to identify themselves and form associations moving forward. The picture that Yancey and Quosigk paint is one of an irreparable split along progressive and conservative lines in the American Evangelical community—to the extent that these interactions should be treated as “interfaith efforts between those of different religious groups” (p. 218).

Like the findings, the applications of this research for ministry practitioners are many; I will highlight two below. This first one is a caution regarding those who may find themselves somewhere in the middle yet see the progressive label as attractive. Those occupying this middle ground may want to consider giving more pride of place to theology in their identity formation than they give to progressive ideology. This is especially true if they wish to keep the great commission front and center in their own ministry.

Also, because the values of progressive and conservative Christians put them at odds with one another, conservative practitioners could “work with politically like-minded groups such as socially conservative Mormons, Jews, and Muslims,” (p. 219) instead of viewing these other religious groups solely as outsiders. This could take the form of partnering with them on such issues as traditional marriage and family values in the public sphere. These efforts would serve a double purpose for the practitioner— first by addressing issues that both groups agree on, and at the same time providing opportunities in the relationship to share the gospel with these traditionally conservative partners.

While the authors of this study do an admirable job of maintaining objectivity, it may come across as slightly favoring the conservative side with some of the conclusions. Yet, the research and the findings are invaluable for ministry practitioners, especially if they are serving in the United States. This book is worthy of being placed on the top of the reading list for those ministering in this context as they seek to navigate the ever-widening split between progressive and conservative evangelicals.